
THE CURRENT SECURITY THOUGHT IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Conferência incluída no Programa do Curso de Defesa Nacional (CDN96), proferida pelo autor no Instituto da Defesa Nacional, em Lisboa e no Porto, respectivamente, em 10 e 11 de Janeiro de 1996.

Sumário:

O autor analisa a questão da segurança Europeia no momento da actual conjuntura internacional, segundo a perspectiva de quatro países da Europa Central – República Checa, Hungria, Polónia e Eslováquia – face à evolução das condições de segurança observadas na Europa Ocidental e na Europa de Leste, e do seu relacionamento com as organizações de segurança colectiva, nomeadamente, a NATO, a OSCE e a União Europeia Ocidental.

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1. Fashioning international frameworks to deal with the processes and tensions unleashed by the collapse of communism would be no easy task in even the best of circumstances. Transformations throughout the post-communist world continue at a breathtaking speed. After years of enforced stability within a rigid constellation, we have entered a period of uncertainty and a difficult, protracted search for new stability.

Given the rapid pace of developments, any account of the current European security agenda from the perspective of East Central Europe will seem provisional, subject to further and further revisions. With this caveat declared, I will proceed in this paper to consider, first, the purported threats and risks to European security today; then move on to survey the place Central Europe wants to establish for itself in the emerging European security structure (which should consist of several building blocks of «interlocking» institutions – OSCE, NATO, WET). I will conclude with a couple of remarks concerning the current debate on NATO expansion. In geographic terms, I will concentrate on four Central European countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia – and only secondarily consider the Balkans, and states emerging from the former Soviet Union that constitute the rest of formerly communist Eastern Europe.

–2. The fall of the Soviet Empire has undeniably opened the way to a new security agenda, different from the one that dominated the decades marked by Europe's division into ideologically polarized blocks. Seemingly overnight, that division disappeared and the hope for European unification rose. All of the new regimes in the former communist bloc declared their commitment to the values of parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, the European division and confrontation gave way to cooperation and ideological homogeneity.

In the fall of 1990, when the Charter for the New Europe was solemnly signed in Paris by all member-states of CSCE, the sky was blue over the «old»

continent. The magnificent vision of pan-European integration, the vision of confederated Europe, which is «no more the conglomeration of different nations influencing one another only through commerce and power struggle» (to use the phrasing of Edmund Husserl, one of the great Europeans of this century) ⁽¹⁾, but the organic unity of peoples connected above all by the shared political culture, respecting in all their differences the same principles of political behaviour, seemed to be more realizable than ever before.

Six years later, however, it is more than obvious that the end of East-West antagonism also had another effect. The expected harmonious progress of Europe towards new international order founded on rule of law and elementary European values has not materialized and a number of problems resurfaced. Idealism dominating the political discourse after the collapse of communism has faded away and realism reasserted itself in European international arena. Not only the East has been thrown into the flux by the sudden reopening of the societies that were closed for decades. The cohesion of Western Europe has also been undergoing a trial that is perhaps more severe and decisive than any – even that posed by the Soviet threat – over the previous 45 years. The resolution of the ideological conflict between East and West, (which entailed the end of the Cold War, and the disintegration of the «socialist camp», that culminated in the split of the Soviet Union), is surely not only a European affair. It is without any doubt the major political event in the second half of 20th century, which has an immense dynamizing effect also in the other parts of the world.

Paradoxically, the disappearance of the worldwide struggle between East and West, behind which always lays the possibility of global nuclear conflict, has led to a decreased degree of stability. For all the deserved enthusiasm about the passing of communism, one elementary truth of power politics should not be overlooked: The ideologically competitive bipolar system, in which the major powers were alert to any risk of erosion of their position that might result from disorder anywhere – the pattern that prevailed in Europe for more than four decades of cold war – was incomparably more stable and (at least in Europe) more peaceful than a system of the sort we see emerging now, in which no major power sees its vital interests in jeopardy in conflict situations almost everywhere.

Whereas the political architecture in Europe was stabilized by its symmetry during the decades of the ideological confrontation of the Cold War, the main characteristic of the current situation in Europe is complex asymmetry

⁽¹⁾ The Vienna Lecture.

and tension between two opposite trends dominating the political processes in the West and in the East: integration and fragmentation.

In a dramatic reversal of cold war security thinking, there is security agenda for countries without any clear and identifiable military enemy. Instead of scenarios of military *threats* that defined security in the cold war, the current security situation in Central Europe is defined by a variety of *risks*, often of a complex nature. The danger lies in the possible conjunction of various risk factors, mutually reinforcing each other and cumulatively jeopardizing peace and security in the region.

What also has to be considered in our current security deliberations is the growing importance of transnational factors, which do not respect the state borders and are not under the control of the governments exerting the sovereign power on their territories. Revolutionary changes in communications and computer technology, the growth of an integrated global market have weakened as a matter of fact the position and role of nation-state in the evolution of international system. It enables freer trade in «bads» as well as in «goods» and makes international crime more significant factor in international relations than ever before. Because territorial nation-states are more open and penetrable now than ever before, any «national» security doctrine or formula cannot afford to ignore the problem of global governance and not to respect the fundamental guidelines of global security policy:

«The primary goals of global security policy should be to prevent conflict and war and to maintain the integrity of the environment and life-support systems of the planet by eliminating the economic, social environmental political and military conditions and generate threats to the security of people and the planet, and by anticipating and managing crises before they escalate into armed conflicts» ⁽²⁾.

3. Among all four Central European countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – there is agreement that the new security agenda must deal with the whole series of ongoing and nascent conflicts that undermine the region's peace and tranquillity.

None of these countries identifies any concrete external enemy in their defence strategies, nevertheless it is clearly perceived in all of them, that the unstable zone where threats and difficulties might come at some point in future is situated in East. Uncertain developments in Russia, Ukraine and other newly

(2) Our Global Neighborhood, Oxford University Press 1995. p. 338.

emerging democracies on the territory of the former Soviet Union, turmoils and crises accompanying their «transitions» from communism, risk of revival of Russian imperialism, represent the most frequently used arguments, why Central Europe feels the need of fast and firm anchoring in the security system of the West. In spite of the fact that there does not seem to be an imminent danger of a forceful reassertion of Russian hegemony in this part of Europe, the future of Russia, as the Central European politicians and security analysts repeat again and again, remains unclear. Even if Russia itself should be stabilized, there is no guarantee of stability for the countries on its periphery – and, indeed, there is some evidence that some forces within Russia might not only welcome, but malevolently aggravate, such instability to create an opening of reassertion of Russian domination.

The other area posing risks to regional security is the Balkans, especially the former Yugoslavia, which has made itself a shorthand place name for a large apparent risk in the region – a seemingly uncontrolled wave of aggressive nationalism, inter-ethnic disputes and conflicts, oppression of minorities, and religious intolerance. All these phenomena have manifested themselves to some degree practically everywhere in the eastern part of the continent. The frustrations of the post-communist environment provide fertile soil for them. Although they are latently present in any society, what makes them especially dangerous and virulent in the East is the weakness of the political system and shock of economic hardship, which tempt demagogical political leaders to base their political strategies on searching for scapegoats and enemies, internal and external.

There is no doubt that what should be blamed in the first place for the explosion of post-totalitarian violence is nationalism and virulent reemergence of ethnicity in the destabilized regions of East Central Europe. Nevertheless, it must be clearly admitted that new nationalists do not operate in vacuum and that the reason why they eventually could succeed must be sought also in the general habits and practices of European «Realpolitik» which made its come-back after the short period of idealistic enthusiasm. The unprecedented Bosnian debacle is definitely not a disastrous product of ethnic principle which made its come-back in many parts of East Central Europe after the collapse of communist ideology, but «the greatest collective security failure of the West since the 1930», as one high-ranked U.S. official put it recently. The «Yugoslav virus», to use Adam Michnik's words, not only has caused the deaths of thousands of innocent people in the territories hit by the epidemics, but is effective also outside the killing zone. It demonstrates inability of Europeans

to act in concert in such a new situation, it reveals not only how inefficient are the existing institutions and mechanisms when confronted with such a crisis but also how precarious and uncertain are even the concepts and ideas which are supposed to give us a clear and undistorted picture of what is going on and make us capable of understanding. The recent American diplomatic initiative resulting in Dayton Agreements finally stopped the deadly war. Nevertheless, the results of the peace process and its impact on the future European developments still remain to be seen.

The way how Western Europe reacted to the Yugoslav crisis reminded us clearly that there may be also some risk factors originating here to be taken into consideration: inability of Western European countries to abandon their national policies in the moments of crisis and to «act in concert»; possibility of economic recession resulting in increased protectionism and reluctance to proceed quickly enough with the reintegration of post-communist countries; possible growth of influence of extremist elements in the Western societies; tensions and eruptions created by inability of Europe to absorb the steady stream of immigrants from the developing world; endemic conflict between post-modern European civilization and religious fundamentalism gaining strength particularly in many Islam countries. These risks obviously cannot be compared to those irradiating from the East, but to see them and count on them is not a kind of Cassandra's prophecy but rather a sound realistic advice for those who want to «return» to Europe.

It is evident that, in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, East Central Europe now finds itself in a dramatically new geopolitical and geostrategic situation, sandwiched between the stable and prosperous West on one side and the vast, destabilized areas of the East, whose political and economic problems differ qualitatively from the hardships of transition through which East Central Europe is passing. As they continue to seek new relationships that would provide them with a satisfactory assurance of security, the East Central European countries still are suspended in strategic uncertainty, sometimes incorrectly referred to as a security vacuum. For sure, the developments of their relationships to both their eastern and western neighbors is a process evolving over time. Nevertheless, all these states clearly have one basic strategic objective: They want to be neither «neutral» so long as Western neighbors see continued utility in a common alliance, nor component of the West's buffer zone. Rather, they would like to be full-fledged members of a European security system, no matter how that system will be defined.

4. All the countries of East Central Europe put much hope in the further development of institutional links with established security organizations of Western Europe. The reason, they are so emphatic about their need to be integrated as much as possible with the West, and especially to obtain from it some security guarantees as soon as possible, reflects not only their evaluation of possible future threats, but also their experience in the past, sitting for decades on the wrong side of the barricade. That is why their views are so different from those of the countries that were neutral in the cold war, such as Austria and Finland, which in many respects would seem to face similar security concerns. On this, domestic political factors play the crucial role – in the way post-communist societies perceive their situation, and in the need of policymakers and politicians in these countries to be able to justify their positions to their publics.

It has been said many times that from the point of view of Central European countries an optimum security structure in Europe should be based on the broad concept of security embracing political, economic and defence components and consist of several «interlocking» and «mutually reinforcing» institutions, namely NATO, EU and OSCE. This is also the reason why all of them consider the full membership in NATO and EU as their vital interest and the most important objective of their foreign policies. I cannot go here into a detailed discussion of all building blocks of the emerging security system. I would like to conclude with several remarks concerning the security debate which is now very popular in Central Europe: the debate on the NATO enlargement.

The report on enlargement unveiled in September 1995 by the former NATO's Secretary General Willy Claes explains clearly the current position of the Alliance:

«NATO invites other European countries to become Allies» as «further step towards the Alliance's basic goal of enhancing security and stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic area, within the context of a broad European security architecture. The NATO enlargement will extend to new members the benefits of common defence and integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions» (par. 2).

«Enlargement should accord with, and help promote, the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and the safeguarding of the freedom, common heritage and civilization of all Alliance members and their people, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. New members will need to conform to these basic principles» (par. 4).

If the admission of new members was really dependent on their conformity with above mentioned principles, on their wiliness to join the Atlantic community and readiness to meet all criteria mentioned in the Study, it would be possible to expect that they would be in pretty soon. The situation, however, is not that easy and unambiguous. The document also states:

«Decision on enlargement will be for NATO itself. Enlargement will occur through a gradual, deliberate, and transparent process, encompassing dialogue with all interested parties. There is no fixed and rigid list of criteria for inviting new member states to join Alliance. Enlargement will be decided on a case-by-case-basis and some nations may attain membership before others» (par. 7)... «Stability and security in Europe will be strengthened through an evolutionary process, taking into account political and security developments in the whole of Europe» (par. 11).

«NATO-Russia relations should reflect Russia's significance in Europe security and be based on reciprocity, mutual respect and confidence, no surprise decisions by either side which could affect the interests of the other. This relationship can only flourish if it is rooted in strict compliance with international commitments and obligations, such as those under the UN Charter, the OSCE, including the Code of Conduct and the CFE Treaty, and full respect for the sovereignty of other independent states. NATO decision, however, cannot be subject to any veto or *droit de regard* by a non-member state, nor can Alliance be subordinated to another European security institution» (par. 27).

These formulas indicate clearly what is the security puzzle the NATO policy planners are solving: how to design and realize a new security system in which NATO apparently has to play the central role and not to divide Europe again into hostile military blocks; how to build a new European security architecture and «not to antagonize Russians». North Atlantic Treaty Cooperation Council (NACC) created at the Rome summit of NATO in 1991 and The Partnership for Peace proposal adopted in Brussels in January of 1994 have been the way how to implement the evolutionary strategy. The Study on NATO enlargement published in a moment when the individual partnership programs are already on their way represent the third step.

What is warning, however, from the point of view of Central Europeans, is that in spite of all promising formulations most of fundamental questions concerning future security arrangements in Europe remain unanswered, that whole security debate in Europe has been dominated by the following unspoken assumptions:

- That it is up to the West to chose just how many or how few of the East Europeans can be included in its institutions;
- That the former communist countries are likely to be more of a burden rather than advantage for the Alliance;
- That is possible to appease the Russians and satisfy the needs of the East Europeans at the same time and, finally;
- That caution in this enterprise, moving slowly and gradually on NATO' enlargement, is beneficial for European security (*).

The Central European countries are without any doubt interested in having good, stable and mutually beneficiary relationships with the Russian Federation and recognize that Russia as one global superpowers having on its disposal nuclear arms has an important contribution to make to European stability and security. They are aware that for the West Russia is a strategic partner of first rate. On the other hand, they do not want to be condemned to passivity in the political processes in which also their security and future perspectives are decided, and to wait-and-see position. They firmly believe that in spite of the Russian negative attitude and more and more open signals coming from Moscow indicating that any concrete step towards the enlargement would be interpreted as a hostile act and beginning of the new round of the cold war in Europe, there is no alternative to the enlargement of NATO; that a concrete decision' «when and how» NATO will expand should be made as soon as possible. Such a move would be, actually, in the security interests of Russia itself. The security limbo and uncertainties in Central Europe can only complicate the Kremlin's calculations to and indefinite degree and efficiently block the emergence of a new, for all European countries desirable security structure.

Of course, the Central European countries should be and in fact they are, patient, as regards their particular security concerns. And they should not push too hard seeing their own national interests only and jeopardizing overall European security developments. On the other hand, it is perfectly clear why the Study on NATO enlargement defining on general level all principles, criteria and conditionalities of this move should be followed, in foreseeable future, by next steps and concrete enlargement decision.

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(*) The arguments presented here are borrowed from a discussion paper of Jonathan Eyal, presented at the conference on the future of European security held in Prague in October 1995.